



COVID-19 Pandemic 2020

Self Isolation

Letting the Light
Into the Room



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

Self Isolation

Letting the light into the room

Last week I walked through a square in the center of Prague to my office, probably for the last time for the foreseeable future. Usually flooded with tourists, the medieval beauty spot was deserted, empty of all sound except birdsong.

Sitting at my desk at home it strikes me how, in such a short time, COVID-19 has changed the way we work, think and act. Isolation, quarantine and homeworking have all led to a dramatic shift from the manner in which we have been used to operating. 'Normal' already seems so far away.

Are you, or your staff, in isolation currently? As the coronavirus escalates, let's take a look at what being grounded might be doing to your mood, and how to lighten the mental load.

The fact is that we are now cut off from our once-regular routines. Common sources of stress during this period include a drop in activities, sensory stimuli and live social engagement. To make matters worse, we also lack access to many of our typical coping strategies, such as going to the gym, cinema or theatre, or meeting up with friends and members of our broader family circle.

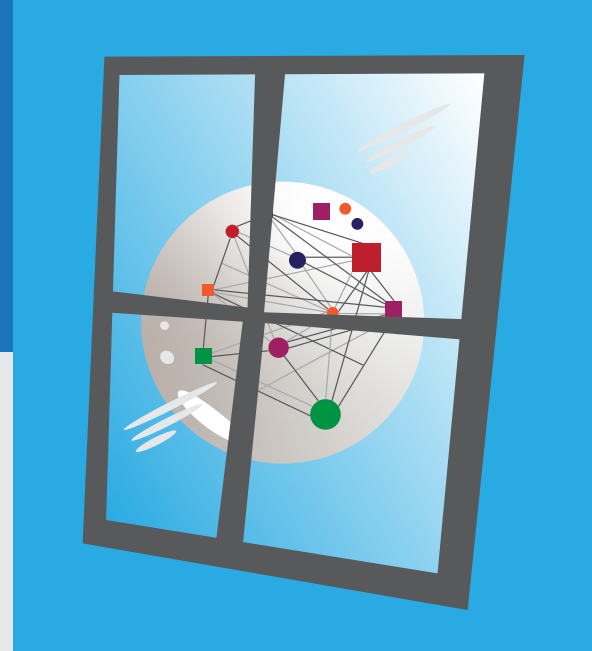
Given all of this, one point is paramount: it is strongly advisable that people stay connected - even if virtually.



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Here are some key points that I invite you to share with your colleagues, staff and wider entourage.



Research quoted by the American Psychologist Association (www.apa.org) confirms what you may already be feeling during this period of social distancing: fear and anxiety, depression and boredom, anger, frustration and irritability. If you are actually in quarantine you may also feel stigmatized.

Fear and anxiety

You and your staff may well be feeling anxious or worried about yourselves and family members falling ill with COVID-19 or spreading it to others. People may worry about obtaining food and personal supplies, despite government reassurances to the contrary, or fulfilling family care obligations. Some may have trouble sleeping or focusing on daily tasks. A powerful source of concern for many will be the financial consequences. And of course, in highly consumption-oriented societies, people fear losing their standard of living.

Depression and boredom

Missing out on meaningful activities interrupts our daily routine and may result in feelings of sadness or low mood. Extended periods of time spent at home can also cause feelings of boredom and loneliness.

Anger, frustration or irritability

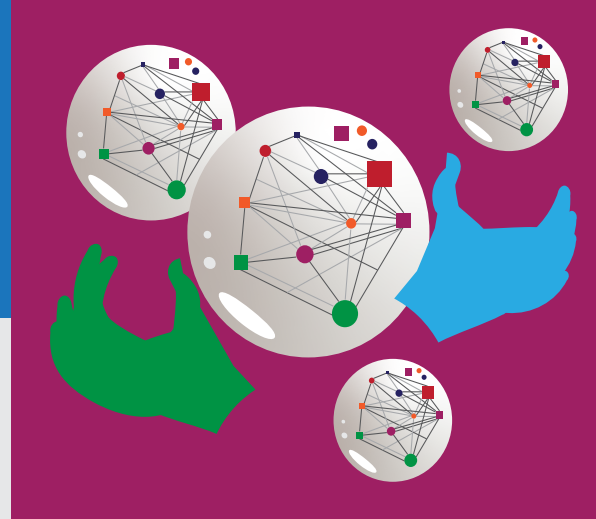
The loss of agency and personal freedom associated with isolation and quarantine can often feel frustrating. People may also experience anger or resentment toward those who have issued quarantine or isolation orders (and those who ignore them).

Stigmatization

People who fall ill, or have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, may feel stigmatised by others who fear they will contract the illness if they interact.

How to cope

Fortunately, the psychology research also points to ways how to manage these difficult conditions. You may want to share these.



Limit news consumption to reliable sources

It's important to obtain accurate and timely public health information regarding COVID-19, but too much exposure to media coverage about the virus can lead to increased feelings of fear and anxiety.

Psychologists recommend balancing time spent on news and social media with other activities unrelated to quarantine or isolation, such as reading, listening to music or learning a new language. Beware of catastrophe scenarios and prophets of doom.

Create and follow a daily routine

Maintaining a daily routine can help both adults (and their children) preserve a sense of order and purpose in their lives despite the unfamiliarity of isolation and quarantine. Try to include regular daily activities, such as work, exercise or learning, even if they must be executed remotely or in interim conditions. Integrate other healthy pastimes as needed.

If you work from home (on an home-office), take it seriously:

- Select a place in your home that's assigned as your workplace and make sure your family and pets respect it.
- Keep an eye on work hours. 9.00-18.00 should be a guide in these intensive times. Switch your computer, your smartphone (and your work head) off after your work-hours.
- Having issues with the beginning and end of the business day? Install a routine that marks the boundary: morning coffee is when work starts, the afternoon walk, run or cycle is when work ends.
- Take regular breaks.
- Keep connected with your colleagues and team — daily ad hoc video or phone calls and weekly regular e-enabled meetings are good practice.
- Do not work in your pyjamas or fitness outfit. Get dressed accordingly. OK, a suit is not a must, but get dressed as if it's casual Friday.
- Avoid mixing house duties with work duties — it distracts your attention. As part of your new routine, you can freshen up your workspace every morning before you start.



Stay virtually connected with your family, friends and colleagues

Your face-to-face interactions may be limited, but psychologists suggest phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media to access social support networks. If you're feeling sad or anxious, use these conversations as an opportunity to discuss your experience and associated emotions. Reach out to those you know who are in a similar situation. Facebook groups have already formed to facilitate communication and support among individuals asked to quarantine.

In some countries, psychologist-volunteers have already initiated 24-7 hotlines for clients in need. Look out for these in your country.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Get enough sleep. This means steering clear of the nocturnal social media and TV streaming trap. And, as mentioned, limit your news consumption, especially before going to bed.

Eat healthily and exercise in your home when you are physically capable of doing so. Try to avoid using alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the stresses of isolation and quarantine. If needed, consider remote options for psychotherapy. If you already have a psychologist, contact him or her ahead of a potential quarantine to see if you can continue your sessions online.

Use psychological strategies to manage stress and stay positive

Examine your worries and aim to be realistic in your assessment of the actual concern as well as your ability to cope. Try not to catastrophize; instead focus on what you can do and accept the things you can't change.

You may also choose to download smartphone Apps that deliver mindfulness and relaxation exercises, exercises for deep breathing, positive imagery, muscle relaxation etc.



Humans have been accompanied by crises since the dawn of time. And these always brought fear, anxiety, concerns and pain. But crisis has also, and always, brought new opportunities. Let's also look at what we're experiencing now in terms of possible benefits: for us as individuals, for our surroundings, for society, and for the world.



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